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CZECHOSLOVAK DESK

MUNICH GERMANY

PROGRAM TITLE : DAY AT HOME AND ABROAD F-80
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THEME: NEGRO RIOTS IN LOS ANGELES - by Lorenc-NY (Czech)

SPEAKER: In the California city of Los Angeles, after five days of the fiercest rioting in many years, relative quiet has been ensured by, in addition to the regular police, 15,000 specially called up National Guardsmen. By Tuesday morning, the racial violence had claimed 33 lives, with 811 people injured and given hospital treatment, and 2,905 persons arrested.

Most remarkable at this moment is how the America of whites collectively searches her conscience. This is manifested in statements by President Johnson and other representatives, in press commentaries, in newspapers interviewing sociologists and publishing their views. Perhaps it can be said that America is considerably terrified. A so called "long hot summer" had been forecast in this sector of American life, but it is in these very months that unparalleled progress has been marked in the emancipation of Negroes, and the riots in Los Angeles seem paradoxical and are surprising.

What had prodded the demonstrators into attacking officials, looting stores, setting fire and destroying things was largely the frenzy and excitement that sometimes overpowers individuals in a crowd when it sets about disturbing the peace and order malevolently, and simply rages. Thus the riots were, in a sense, a criminal revolt by the mob against the rule of law. Somewhat more subtly, but just as truthfully, it can be said they

represented a revolt by exasperated citizens standing outside the mainstream of American life, into which they want to enter, but, for the present, cannot enter fast enough -- a revolt against individuals and institutions representing that mainstream, from policemen and fire-engines to offices, stores and restaurants. To contend that the disturbances were an expression of the class fight of the poor against the rich would be oversimplifying the whole affair and only noting some outward signs. The truth is that the riots were a racial affair -- an expression of tension between Negroes and whites -- and that, this time, the string was snapped by the Negroes in a district of the city of Los Angeles. But to say this is not enough, either; basically, the riots were an expression of rebellion against the heritage of centuries of discrimination and injustice. In America, this heritage, this tradition is being eliminated at a speed that is characteristic of America. And yet, it is a job that takes time. It was started at top levels -- by the passage of new laws and introduction of new government programs, such as the law providing for the Negroes' right to vote, or the government's anti-poverty program. For the most part, the Negroes in the Los Angeles district of Watts have as yet not experienced the promised new advantages and possibilities and opportunities, and a long wait naturally makes a man nervous and irritable. What also played a role was the fact that Los Angeles was hit by a heat wave, which has an irritating effect, too.

Today the district of Watts resembles a desolate scene after a hurricane; springing up everywhere are first-aid stations, food distribution centers, offices of charitable societies, and the like. Efforts of public agencies, and now also of the majority of the local Negro population, are concentrated on ensuring order

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and repairing damage as life returns to normal. The atmosphere there is one of depression rather than tension. Governor Edmund Brown of California has established a special seven member commission which is to find out and analyze the causes of the riots. In Washington, as everywhere else in the United States, the Los Angeles events are also regarded as a lesson one must study, so as to know what to do better, more speedily, or differently. In no place has there ever been done so much to eliminate discrimination and to correct the many years of historic wrong as in America in recent years. But the final phases of this endeavor apparently are more complicated and more difficult than the initial ones.